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ABSTRACT

This article proposes to teach writing from the hypothesis that true writing and good prose are only end products rather than the primary objectives. The author suggests that producing an effect in a reader and revealing the self in words are prior achievements in the process of learning to write well. Criteria for judging writing are based largely on an attempt to achieve empirical class judgment. The method is intended principally for college freshmen. (Author/RL)

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A Method for Teaching Writing

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The Problem

"Is English really your native tongue?" So wrote a Dartmouth Freshman English teacher on his student's essay. English teachers try not to think about how often this comment fits the essays they grade. My hypothesis is that students seldom learn to write in these courses as well as one could expect them to do as natives. They write essays which lack the skills and competences that they seem naturally to possess in their normal command of language. Of course there are important differences between what students are naturally good at with language and what is required for college essays. But these differences are not so complete as some maintain. There could be more transfer of learning than there usually is.

Writing as Producing a Specific Effect in the Reader

Two common criteria for judging writing:

1) Is the writing *true*? does it embody good reasoning (valid inferences and adequate documentation) and good ideas?

2) Is the writing good, effective, pleasing in the sense of being "*good style*?" This judgment emphasizes form more than content, but not trivially: "He can say whatever he wants, *but only* if it comes in clear, strong sentences; unified, coherent paragraphs; and total essays that hang together around a clear progression of ideas with a beginning, middle, and end."

But there is a third model or criterion for judging the quality of writing: whether it produces the desired effect in the reader. Teachers tend to use the first two criteria, but this third is the one that people exercise, whether consciously or not, from the day they begin to use language at all. Everyone learned to use language almost automatically in his first years and has learned—unless there is brain damage—to be very skilled at using words to make certain things happen, i.e., to make people respond to him in certain ways. He may not consciously attend to the effects he is trying to produce nor the techniques he uses for producing them; and if he is neurotic the effects may even be opposite to those he consciously desires. But the skill with language is invariably there. Writing courses need to *use* it and transform it for new ends—not work against it.

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What is called for then is a writing course which ignores, at least initially, the first two criteria—whether the writing is true or good style. (This would not be a course for students who are already excellent writers.) The point is to try to build from strength and only gradually to proceed toward areas of weakness. We can try as much as possible, thereby, to avoid the common school situation in which the student is trying to satisfy criteria that he doesn't know, feel, or understand, and thus cannot really accept, even if he wants to.

Judging the *effect* of a piece of writing, however, is a subtle business. The effect tends to be intangible and difficult to specify. But we can simplify the matter. The student writing will be designed to produce a specific piece of *overt behavior* in a reader. Whether it succeeds or not is therefore readily observable.

In the first meeting of the course the teacher presents the problem of writing to the class in exactly these terms. He asks the class to reflect on situations—past or present—of putting words on paper to produce a desired behavior. It is important at this point that this conception be fleshed out from the class's own experience and speculation—not the teacher's. The class must think of assignments: it must come up with instances it can take seriously. For when I produce examples—e.g., how to get a refund on a faulty product, how to get a letter with a certain thesis into a certain newspaper, how to get a certain service from a government official, how to get a raise from a specific employer—many people find them crude, artificial, and corny. I find them clean, solid, and extremely interesting because I feel the need for solid, empirical bedrock in this mysterious matter of words on paper—even at the cost of some gentility or sophistication.

So let the class invent its own assignments. If it wants more sophistication, fine. So long as it keeps to this empirical model of writing. Perhaps it will want to pick some member of the class or some member of the college administration with a given opinion and see what words on paper have any effect in changing it. Perhaps an essay or story for a certain magazine. Perhaps words on paper to help in a specific situation of grief or anxiety—words written either by the person himself (diary or journal) or by someone else to the troubled person. Most classes will come up with far better ideas than these. But "better" is misleading: the right assignments are simply those that the members of the class can take seriously. The teacher must be firm in throwing this matter into the lap of the class. If the class takes time to handle it, that time will not have been wasted. If the class cannot come up with any cases of words on paper it can take seriously then it has specified its situation rather well. If it did not deal explicitly with this situation it would be neglecting its main business.

The teacher gets a new role by this shift of criteria from truth and good style to effect. He is no longer the authority on standards of excellence. For though he may know more than most of his students about truth in writing and good style, he is not the authority on whether writing produces specified behavior.

Indeed, the class must try to be completely empirical in its judgments. It will not only send off letters to the newspaper and see which ones get published, but also invite businessmen, officials, etc. to reveal their responses. Many will come to class when invited. The person whose mind was to be changed must be persuaded to come to class and tell the different effects of the papers. The role of the teacher will be to help students achieve the goal they specified and to help students discover why some things worked and others did not. (Empirical does not mean simpleminded; though the empirical class is not free to conclude that certain businessmen, teachers, or editors behave differently from the way

they in fact do behave, it is of course free to conclude that their behavior is contradictory, that they should behave differently, or that they are insensitive to certain properties of words on paper.)

But the whole point of empirical feedback is to learn to judge for oneself. Therefore every member of the class will judge all the papers. First the class must agree on an assignment: a problem, a piece of desired behavior, and perhaps an agreed-on set of facts that all writers must stick to. Then all papers are photo-copied so that all students get copies and judge their effectiveness. (The plan requires access to inexpensive photocopying.) The class hour is used to discuss differences of judgment. The teacher's role is primarily to see that the class performs this function: fighting out disagreements and mutually explaining why some think one paper is better at producing the given effect and some another—and what things in the writing had what effect. (People without conventional "English teacher" training might do an excellent job teaching this sort of class.)

I see four reasons why it is crucial for the students all to be readers and judges. 1) It means starting with skills that students *do* possess. It forces the student to realize that he does in fact have standards and criteria for judging writing. And it requires that he develop them. The procedure should prevent a common dilemma in which the student becomes completely disoriented; he feels he's lost all idea of what is good and what is bad; he loses all confidence in his powers of responding validly to the quality of writing. Perhaps students do not possess exactly the criteria for evaluating writing that college teachers feel are the right ones: "they prefer bad writing"; "they have bad taste!" "Good" and "bad" writing, however, are not absolutes. The question is "good for what" and "bad for what." The student's best hope of learning the teacher's criteria will come from enhancing and building up his *own* talents for distinguishing certain kinds of goodness in writing from certain kinds of badness. His criteria can be naturally developed and expanded. (And there may not be such a large gap—in terms of development—between the student's "bad" taste and the teacher's "good" taste.) But if the student's ability to judge according to his own criteria is stamped out and he is asked to start from scratch in learning the teacher's criteria, he is apt to be stymied and even permanently damaged in his ability to write well.

2) I don't mean to imply all students as fine, intuitive sensibilities and all writing teachers as rigid ogres. A student will often enough be baffled by the judgment of his classmates on his paper as much as he might have been baffled by the judgment of his teacher. Yet it is better this way. For students seldom really *believe* what the teacher says about their writing. They may say "Oh, I see now" to the teacher's explanation. More often they make do with a glum sigh of ostensible assent. Of course they have to put up with the teacher's judgment; but really it is often resisted—especially because the teacher is a repository of authority and this gets mixed up with his also being the repository of standards for excellence. Where the adverse judgment of a class on a paper may occasionally seem high-handed and dictatorial, yet the beleaguered student's plight is better in two ways. First, he can resist it better. He can say "What do they know! I know as much about writing as they do—more in fact!" But second, he is coerced to assent to their judgment more powerfully yet more validly than he is apt to assent to the teacher's judgment. For there is no right and wrong in this business. It's just a matter of whether something works. If he cannot get his classmates to think it works—and especially if outside validation confirms the class—then he has not in fact succeeded at that assignment. But the process of outside validation will

muddy the water and force the class to try to be flexible: it will discover that different readers—e.g., different businessmen—are affected by different qualities of writing.

3) It is terrifically helpful for one's writing to read a stack of papers of very mixed quality all on exactly the same subject. This is an experience that all teachers have. Most realize how much they learn from it, even if they wish it happened less frequently. But it is an experience that students never have. If you read only competent writing it is hard to know or feel what makes it so.

4) It is simply fun and interesting for the class to read and discuss its own papers.

This strategy consists, in short, of starting from strength—starting from the criteria which the student already instinctively uses—and only moving toward new or different criteria as the students discover them and accept them. I am not meaning to imply, condescendingly, that many students are complete novices in satisfying the criteria of truth and good style; but I sense that the strength and guts of most students' real skill with language is tied in with the use of language that has received their commitment for the last sixteen years—language designed to produce an effect on an audience. Correspondingly, the disturbing characteristic of much student essay writing is precisely its lack of force or guts.

But the important thing is that the criteria of truth and good style are not wholly different from the third criterion being exercised in this course. The proposed strategy will mobilize natural skills in language and then develop them so that they come to include the first two criteria. Before long, students will themselves invent truth and good style as two—but not the only two—special subsets in the problem of producing a desired effect. The class will end up talking about all the aspects of good reasoning and good style that any teacher could desire, and techniques for achieving them —and in the process will probably *accept* more learning from the teacher than before. They will also attain a realistic appraisal and understanding of the role of "correctness"—spelling, grammar, etc. They will learn that for certain kinds of writing it is not so important, and this will better free them to see how it is necessary in most other situations to produce certain effects and behaviors. The strategy would prevent a situation that is not uncommon: students sometimes feel that criteria for good writing are imposed from above by the teacher, and therefore they naively blame and resent him for what are simply conventions of correctness. Students will be forced to derive trustworthy criteria for themselves. The strategy here, in short, is that "producing an effect" is not really a criterion in itself but rather a neutral rubric which contains all criteria.

Students will not take long to specify writing problems closer to the classroom, e.g., how to produce the behavior in a history teacher of giving an A on a freshman history essay. All will write an assigned essay for the history course and ask a history teacher to grade them and come to class to explain. When the class does this a number of times, students will begin to attain a sound understanding of the problem of writing satisfactory college essays. For example, they might well develop real misgivings about the criteria used by a teacher—and conclude they had attained much sounder ones in their course's explorations. They will nevertheless see that the teacher is a teacher and that they will probably have to write essays for him. But they will understand what his criteria are and see them as one set among a wide range of possibilities—and be able to decide freely and realistically how to respond to the teacher's demands.

Inviting teachers in will be very interesting for the teachers as well. It will sharpen their perception of their own

criteria. I can well imagine a teacher saying his criteria are x, y, and z, and the class replying that really he uses v, w, x. However the argument ends up, everyone will learn a lot.

It may be objected that this program spends too much time exploring criteria and too little time learning how to *satisfy* the new and difficult criteria that a college student must meet; that the program neglects the brute necessity of learning skills—correct syntax, clear paragraphing, good style, coherent reasoning. I do not wish to imply that these skills are easy—far from it. Yet I am sure that learning them is far easier than it often seems. But these criteria must be clearly seen, and above all, realistically accepted. I am sure that when a student seems unable to learn some of these skills—when he goes on for months or years without really mastering them—often he is covertly refusing to accept them. He may say "I guess I just don't have good study habits," or "I am just too lazy," or "I just can't seem to *get* writing," or "I guess I'm just not verbal." But covertly he may be saying "I'm damned if I'm going to give in and play word games according to the rules of those goddam teachers." Notice that his humble or contrite assessment of why he doesn't seem to write well blandly lacks the natural force he possesses as a person; his real juice is bound up with the resentful refusal that he does not express—probably not even to himself.

Until students have discovered, felt, and accepted the criteria, a teacher simply wastes his time trying to teach students to satisfy them. And once a student has accepted them he gets on rather quickly and forcefully with the business of learning how to satisfy them. In the procedure I am advocating it would be quite natural for a class of poorly trained students to decide at some point in the middle of the course to devote the next three weeks to grammar drill. They finally can see it is worth their time. In those three weeks they will learn more grammar than if the whole term had been devoted to it.

In recent years teachers of writing have begun to learn how immensely it helps a student's writing if he imagines a specific audience. Better yet if he has one. This can be seen as support for my hypothesis: the student's best language skills are brought out and developed when writing is considered as words on paper designed to produce a specific effect in a specific reader. Other excellences in writing are best produced as developments from this model.

Writing as Revealing the Author's Self in His Words

Two experiences have recently given me concrete meaning for what was previously a vague concept—the self revealed in words. The first experience was literary: trying to understand what made *Moll Flanders* a better book than my existing literary criteria seemed to suggest it was ("*Moll Flanders* and the Problem of the Novel as Literary Art," unpublished essay, Honorable Mention, English Institute, 1967). One of the important things about that novel is the way you can actually hear Moll speaking in the words on the page. Robert Frost made the specific connection between this phenomenon and a good prose style:

> Everything written is as good as it is dramatic. . . . A dramatic necessity goes deep into the nature of the sentence. Sentences are not different enough to hold the attention unless they are dramatic. No ingenuity of varying structure will do. All that can save them is the speaking tone of voice somehow entangled in the words and fastened to the page for the ear of the imagination. That is all that can save poetry from sing-song, all that can save prose from itself. (From the introduction to "A Way Out;" quoted in "The Speaking Voice," Reuben Brower, reprinted in *The Study of Literature*, Sylvan Barnet, Morton Berman, William Burto, eds. [Boston, 1960], p. 160.)

When words carry the sound of a person —whether in fiction, poetry or an essay —they are alive. Without it they are dead.

Now this capacity to write words which contain a voice may not be everything. We all know students who have it and yet still write poor essays. But it is a lot. I think it is a root quality of good writing and that we should try to teach it. A student who has it may make spelling and syntactical errors, he may organize his papers badly and reason badly; and his sentences may contradict all the structural canons of what is currently called good prose. But there is a real sense in which he already has the main characteristic of good prose: his words hang together into felt syntactical units whose meanings jump immediately and automatically into the reader's head. And from what he has, the other excellences can grow more naturally, organically,— and usually more quickly—than in the case of the student whose words on paper are totally lacking in life.

A student who has a voice in the words he puts on paper can be said to "have words" or be able to "find words" in a way that the other student cannot. This can be quite literally the case: many students without a voice simply have an agonizing time *finding words.* They struggle over each sentence, break down in the middle, and sometimes cannot even produce at all. It can be a kind of muteness or radical incoherence. Others who lack a voice can find words but those words are not strong and centered. Such persons are often those who cannot, in fact, stop the words from rushing to the page, but the words are flaccid and without force or point. Of course the student who has a voice must often struggle too. He struggles to decide on the best word; he struggles especially in revising; but he hasn't the terrible struggle simply to emerge from silence—or from the functional silence of empty wordiness. The student who has a voice can "unlock his word-hoard." The connotations of the poet's kenning are appropriate. Everyone does have a "word-hoard": a collection of words that are connected to his strong and primary experiences in the world—as opposed to words which (putting it inexactly) are only connected to other words. (Cf. L. S. Vygotsky on "spontaneous" and "scientific" concepts in *Thought and Language* [Cambridge, Mass., 1962].)

How to teach students to write with a voice is difficult to know. Frost emphasizes what we already guess—that we miss the whole point if we concentrate on tricks of structure. But the following procedure would help. The students read a writer with a particularly strong and obvious—"loud"—voice and then try to write something that produces the same voice. The object is for the student to "get inside" the self of the imitated writer by getting the sound of his tone of voice. It is an exercise in producing words that sound like a person and not merely like meanings. The class tries this assignment with various writers. Here again the class would serve as the official judge: the judgment of all the readers in the class is in fact the best judge of which papers get the imitated writer's voice into the words on the page. The teacher—or any single person—is in danger of prejudging the question because of conventional parameters for defining style. For the assignment is to get the *sound* not the style. I think I can imagine two papers of which one seemed closer to the style of the model, and yet the other attained more unmistakably the sound of the model. That is to say I don't know where the sound comes from. In the class judgment there is not likely to be tidy agreement about the matter. But that's as it should be with something not fully understood.

The second experience to give me a sense of what is really meant by a self revealed through the words on the page is not literary but pragmatic—the experience of being a draft counselor trying to

help conscientious objectors in their preparation of #150 forms for their draft boards. The CO who wants to be classified as such by his draft board must answer questions about his beliefs. Ostensibly his answers tell the draft board whether or not he has the right belief. In order to be recognized as a CO, the man must have a belief that is *religious* and it must compel him to refrain from fighting in *all war*. But draft boards do not give the classification to everyone who describes such beliefs. There are too many. The Supreme Court's Seeger decision in 1965 defined as religious any belief which occupies a central place in the life of the man (like the belief in God of the traditional CO). And nuclear weapons have increased the number of people who cannot support any war. (Cf. my article, "Who Is a Conscientious Objector?" *Christian Century*, August 7, 1968.)

Therefore draft boards now rule more and more frequently on the question of sincerity—whether the person really *does* believe the things he says he believes. And so questions which look as though they are meant to reveal whether the man has the right belief are in fact crucially used to reveal whether he has the belief he says he has.

Students I have counseled seem to be strikingly bad at this test. In the first place they tend to start by describing something which is not really their belief at all. (I can speak freely because I did the same dance.) It seems we come out of our educational process thinking that when we give an account of what makes sense—of what we feel we can ask others to assent to—we have stated our belief. The absurdity of this notion is clear when it is stated so baldly, but it is amazing how many persons give this kind of answer when asked to tell their beliefs. We are slow to realize that belief is what you call on when action is required and knowledge and evidence do not provide certainty. (And they never do: philosophers demonstrate how "is's" cannot give birth to "ought's.")

Perhaps the difficulty is that the registrant wants to show that his belief makes sense—that it holds. But whether the belief holds is irrelevant. Draft boards are not asking to be proven stupid or evil—which is what follows from a demonstration that the CO's belief holds.

The only issue is whether the applicant *holds* his belief. And so even after he succeeds in really determining what his belief is, there is the mysterious matter of how to state it in such a way that the reader believes that he believes it.

Literary critics have tended to assent to the exorcism of "sincerity."[1] But the draft counselor has his nose rubbed in it. He's faced every day with the difference between an answer that makes him respond "I'm not at all convinced this guy believes this stuff," and one which makes him respond "Yes. It is clear he believes these things." And it has nothing to do with the content of the belief: some-

[1] It is a corrective simply to spell out what follows from the premise that there is an unconscious. (A) Intention becomes messy: in our use of words, as in other behavior, we must sometimes distinguish between what we thought we intended and another intention we were not aware of. (B) What this means for the interpretation of literature is that we are cowards to decide there is no intention just because we cannot be certain what it is. Besides, with certain kinds of evidence, tact, and practice, we can sometimes have a pretty good idea. Of course anyone who wishes may decide that the intention is not part of the *work*. But most readers—even if they see the sense in which a work of literature is a detached, timeless piece of significant form—nevertheless cannot refrain from also responding to literature as they respond to words uttered by whole men living in real time and space: "Am I sure he means what he seems to say he means?" (The concrete advice of Wimsatt and Beardsley—in effect not to trust the teller but the tale—was more right than wrong since it made us see intention as more complex than what the writer said he had in mind.) (C) What this means for rhetoric is that we are not always right when we think we are sincere. We can make good use of the ears of others in trying to determine what we really mean.

times the sincerity of the most outlandish belief is beyond question, while the statement of a "tame," almost universal, belief carries no conviction; sometimes *vice versa.*

The situation forces out into the open an important criterion for writing: one must refrain from considering these pieces of discursive prose in terms of whether the assertions make sense or are consistent, and judge them instead in terms of whether they reveal a person who holds the assertions—whatever the assertions may be. I realized I was faced with a pragmatic but pure instance of the problem that critics of literature and teachers of writing have talked of for so long—whether writing is "alive." If the teacher of Freshman English does not teach his student to write "lively" prose, the student is likely to get lower grades for the rest of his college career. If the draft counselor does not succeed in helping the registrant write prose which is "alive" in this primary sense—prose which contains not just propositions but a person—the man is likely to have to go to jail.

Teaching Freshman English may be trying, but this situation is downright frightening. After more than a year of it I still haven't a clue as to the objective ingredients of this "aliveness." The only thing I have learned is to say to the man who lacks it, "Look, I don't believe you! I can't feel any person in these words! You've made all these interesting statements but really I haven't the slightest idea who you are. I can't *hear* you." But this helpless response turns out powerful. It forces the man to look at what he has written from a point of view he is unaccustomed to. He struggles and flounders and is baffled. But he is finally forced to realize that he has left out the main thing—even if he doesn't know what that main thing is. The situation is grave enough that he knows he has to go home and try to put himself into his words. The new product—to the extent that it is an improvement—may not be objectively more graceful, correct, or logical than before. But it does have what writing teachers are most eager to produce—writing that is alive and reveals a person.

Thus even though I don't understand the observable ingredients of this aspect of good writing, and therefore haven't any theoretically justifiable rules for teaching it, I nevertheless end up teaching it (or rather helping others to produce it) more consistently than anything I ever taught as a Freshman English teacher. The moral seems to be that asking for the right thing may be better than knowing how to explain what you ask for: i.e., even if x, y, and z are all valid ways to conceive the capacity that you are trying to teach, and even if you understand x and y much better than z, nevertheless you may teach it better by asking for z.

Therefore I propose reproducing this situation for our writing course. Students will be asked to write pieces for which the test is *not* whether the assertions make sense or are consistent but whether the reader feels the writer in the words—whether the reader believes that the writer believes it. (For irony, a more complex formulation is required.) Again the best yardstick in this imprecise matter will be the judgment of all the members of the class. This is really a subset of the category of writing designed to produce a certain effect in the reader. But it would be aimed at a particular root capacity in writing—the ability to have a voice, to find words; not to be incoherent, tongue-tied, or emptily verbose. In short, to write from within the self.

What would these writing exercises be? Wouldn't they be invasions of privacy inappropriate to school? Some exercises might seem personal. For example, the questions relating to conscientious objection seem very rich and useful writing problems. But if some students felt lack of privacy as a problem, papers need not be signed. As long as the student gets

feedback on his paper—which he would do from class assessment and discussion—there is no need for the teacher or the class member to know the author.

But I am not talking about intimate, autobiographical "self-exposure" when I talk of "revealing a self in words." Writing in words which "reveal the self" has nothing necessarily to do with exposing intimacies—undressing. For I am talking about the sound or feel of a believable person simply in the fabric of the words. The most intimate revelations can be put in words that are not alive and have no self; and conversely, the most impersonal reasoning—in lean, laconic, "unrevealing" prose—can nevertheless be alive and infused with the presence of a person or a self. It would be important, therefore, to have some exercises about matters which are relatively impersonal but to judge them solely in terms of whether conviction is displayed—whether the writer is *in* the words. This would teach the students that this quality is not to be confused with undressing. (Actually the person in the words need not be the "real" self of the author; it is the gift of truly creative writers to reveal different "selves" in written words.)

The notion of judging an essay solely on whether it contains conviction and a self will set some teachers' teeth on edge: "This kid has plenty of *conviction* and *self* in his words—too much! What he needs is to reason carefully and write a decent sentence." This response is difficult to avoid. But maybe it's necessary to go *through* conviction and self rather than away from them or around them. Maybe the quickest path to good reasoning and decent sentence writing—and we must admit that we haven't yet found quick ones—is through learning better how to write words that reveal conviction and a person. And it is important to remember that the class's judgment here may be more accurate than the teacher's: it might not agree, for example, that "this kid has plenty of conviction and self in his words." It might see the paper as pretty fake—as in fact *lacking* conviction and self—and be right. When it got the student to burn through the prose he had been using in his words, I suspect he would reason better and make decent sentences.

Summing up

It will be objected that I am abandoning the teaching of what is observable and explainable—truth and good style—for what is mysterious and unexplainable—whether it affects the reader in the desired way and whether a self is revealed in the words. Though the terms of the objection may be true, I don't think the objection holds up. *Perhaps* we have better rules for manipulating propositions to achieve the truth than for manipulating words to produce specific effects in the reader; *perhaps* we have better rules for building words into a clear and effective prose style than for putting down live words to reveal a self. But these indeterminate and unexplainable qualities may still be more worth concentrating on. It may be that the most characteristic use of language—the use of language that will permit people to liberate and develop the greatest skill—is language for the production of certain effects in readers and the presentation of the self. It may be that teachers put students into a trap by telling them to do x and y and not z, when the best way to do x and y is to do z. It is a common idea that freshmen have too much sincerity and too little sophistication and tough-mindedness. But I wonder. Ostensible sincerity may mask a fearful avoidance of the real thing.

Some readers will notice that I am disguising as iconoclasm the wisdom of tradition and common sense. But the essay would never sell under the title "Getting Aristotle Back into Freshman English." Yet it will be recalled that Aristotle devotes far more space in his *Rhetoric* to the speaker and the audience—and begins with these topics—than he does to the

speech. He understands rhetoric as a transaction between the self and the audience—the two prior realities in the human activity of verbal composition and communication. He recognizes that this activity is not the same as that of determining the truth. C. S. Baldwin describes Aristotle's approach:

> Aristotle's division and its order are the division and the order not merely of analysis, but of much the same synthesis as underlies the actual processes of composition. I begin with myself; for the subject-matter else is dead, remaining abstract. It begins to live, to become persuasive, when it becomes my message. Then only have I really a subject for presentation. A subject, for purposes of address as distinct from purposes of investigation, must include the speaker. It is mine if it arouses me. I consider next the audience, not for concession or compromise, but for adaptation. What is mine must become theirs. Therefore I must know them, their ηθος and their παθος. My address becomes concrete through my effort to bring it home. The truth must prevail—through what? Against what? Not only through or against reasoning, but through or against complexes of general moral habit and the emotions of the occasion. I must establish sympathy, win openness of mind, instruct in such wise as to please and awaken, rouse to action. My speech is for these people now. Only thus am I ready to consider composition; for only thus can I know what arguments are available, or what order will be effective, or what style will tell. (*Ancient Rhetoric and Poetic* [New York, 1924], pp. 12, 13.)

Cicero and Quintilian carry on this tradition.

If we leave tradition and look to common sense we notice how students who don't write well can miraculously achieve a high degree of truth and a strong, clear prose on certain occasions when they somehow involve their selves and get turned on: sometimes on an exam, sometimes very late at night on a paper due next morning, and sometimes in personal communications like important personal letters. Sufficient pressure has built up to force the student finally to put himself into his words, and there is usually a strong sense of desired audience response which focuses the words and thoughts. Is he not, on such occasions, finally doing precisely what we are talking about here? Working for a specific effect and revealing himself in his words?

From here, in fact, we may even wonder about those rules for truth and good style. Are they really so trustworthy? Those rules only approximate the outward characteristics of the prose of writers who excel at using language to produce desired effects and reveal the self. For such writers can depart wildly from these approximations and still produce good writing. These rules ignore the generative principles which *produced* the truth and the good prose.

In short, this is a proposal to teach writing from the hypothesis that true writing and good prose are only end products and are—from the standpoint of development—almost epiphenomenal. Producing an effect in a reader and revealing the self in words are prior achievements in the process of learning to write well. The use of all the members of the class as judges is not merely a strategic nod towards participatory democracy but rather the most valid way to exercise these essential prior criteria.

Final Considerations

In thinking about this approach I have had college freshmen in mind simply because my experience in teaching writing has been with college students. But I don't see why it wouldn't be at least as appropriate to high school.

It would be easiest to point this proposal at very poorly prepared, "disadvantaged" students. With them, the inability to transfer obvious linguistic skill to the production of good written essays is most glaring. But I suspect that the loss

is just as great in competent, well trained students.

I don't wish to diminish the validity of other models for the use of words. For example, words can usefully be thought of in a way that has little to do with a self, an audience, or an effect. That is, we can think of words as approaching the blessed condition of number—as a truthseeking machine, a prosthesis for the brain: writing thus can usefully be conceived as the manipulation of propositions according to the rules of grammar and logic—and according to the (half) rules of association and metaphor—to see what new propositions can be made to emerge. This is a model which emphasizes the use of words as thinking.

But thinking is not the same as writing. It is true that they vastly overlap. Words in the human head tend to be accompanied by concurrent thought; but thought tends to come in the medium of words. Or more concretely, nothing helps in writing an essay like having an idea; but students think amazingly better when they finally mobilize their natural skill with language and learn to write from inside a self. But in spite of this overlap, being able to think well is *not* the same as being able to write well—and certainly not the same as being able to have a voice, find words, and produce a desired response in a reader.

Of course thinking ought to be taught to freshmen. Perhaps there should be one term which stresses writing and another which stresses thinking. Since the former is too important to be left to English teachers and the latter too important to be left to philosophers, why not have all departments staff these courses and keep class sizes down to ten or fifteen?

But it may be a mistake to reduce to one term the amount of time devoted to writing. For if there is any validity in this essay it points to the conclusion that we are hasty in our teaching of writing. Freshman English courses have tended to try prematurely to induce the outward manifestations of good writing—control and self-conscious clarity. But real writers have constantly stressed how long it takes to learn to write; and most have recognized that good writers may have to write very badly for a long time—usually purple. If a whole term does not fill most essays with excellent reasoning and a good prose style, it will be too soon to call it the wrong path. It may still be the shortest one. After all, under present techniques, few are satisfied with the writing even of seniors and graduate students.

If a college didn't want to commit more than a term's worth of money and effort, it could adopt the following plan: The course would run all year but meet only once a week for one and a half or two hours. Students would turn in papers to an office three days before the meeting and pick up the complete stack of photocopied essays two days before the meeting. The classes wouldn't require a great deal of teacher preparation beyond reading the stack of papers and trying to think about responses. Indeed this would be a good place to begin experiments with teacherless classes.

What about grading? What I propose in this article suggests experimentation: since the class's job is to figure out different ways in which writing succeeds in being good, the class might play an important part in grading. But even if it is not possible or desirable to depart from orthodox grading, it would make sense to treat the weekly assignment not as grade-determining tests but rather as exercises in getting feedback and therefore learning how to write better—i.e., as *preparation* for grade-determining tests. Why not grade the student on, say, five essays he chooses to revise on the basis of class feedback and hands in at the end of the course? This would make the grade more nearly a measure of what the student has attained over the period of the course.